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SERMON.

Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready.—*John, VII.* 6.

HIS friends were desirous that Jesus of Nazareth should make an early, public appearance in Jerusalem—the Metropolis—and there issue a manifesto or do some mighty work that would push Him into notice and call attention to His extraordinary ideas and powers. It appears from the Record that they took advantage of the approach of the Feast of Booths, commemorative of the forty years of tent-life in the wilderness, at the time of the Exodus. Upon that occasion the city was crowded with guests from all corners of the Jewish world, and hence highly favorable for such a display as they contemplated. For some reason, Jesus had been lingering in Galilee doing miracles

and discoursing in His original, interesting, and inimitable manner. His kinsfolk, meanwhile, observing His singular gifts, tell Him that, in their judgment, Galilee is too narrow and obscure a theatre for one of His natural ability, and they consequently urge Him to move in a larger sphere, and with that view to go up and meet the crowds who were flocking to the populous Capital, to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Evangelist John intimates that their advice was inspired rather by pride and self-gratulation, that one related to them by ties of blood should be able to draw upon himself public attention. It was not that they believed firmly in His supernatural character as a Messenger sent of God; their feeling was simply this, that one of their kin had shown himself to be a remarkable person who would be likely to reflect credit and consideration upon themselves, could He only be induced to break His characteristic reserve. It seems to have been an itching after popularity, a desire to make the most of themselves and to share the glory which would accrue to Jesus when He should become the hero of the hour and receive a popular ovation. Con-

sequently they say unto Him, "If thou doest these things, show thyself to the world."

It was perfectly natural in them both to think and to speak thus. Average human nature always reasons in like manner. "What is the use in a man possessing power of any kind, if he does not make profit out of it, capital out of it?" We can all understand this state of mind and sympathize with it. These people looked upon Jesus as one who could easily make the great world stand and stare and gape with wide-eyed wonderment, and that such an one should hide himself away, bashful and secretive, instead of taking the place which nature assigned to Him, by virtue of His singular and powerful talents, seemed to them to indicate a weak spot in character, a fatal apathy in respect to His true interest. It is clear that these friends of Messiah stood upon a mercenary plane; they looked upon His debut at this junction of Jewish affairs as furnishing a capital opportunity to create a furore of enthusiasm and make themselves "lions" of the hour and leaders of a public movement. Christ replied, in effect, to their proposal, that all men are not born on the same day, in the same cradle, under the

same star, to the same destiny, and hence that what would be safe and sound advice for one is not necessarily so for another. "Your time is always ready; my time is not yet come." He says to them, in substance, "You can go up to the Feast of Booths, whenever you desire; it does not matter whether you go now or later—or indeed whether you go at all; but as regards myself, there are deeper considerations to be taken account of and of which I alone can judge."

Clearly He speaks as one under the pressure of a divine call. When that epoch in His personal experience occurred, is not given either as to time or circumstance; but in all likelihood it was not until it broke over His soul with irresistible power and vivid reality, that He began His public ministry.

Silently and secretly as the seed sprouts, as the bud swells, as the flower unfolds, so this idea had been slowly taking possession of His soul, growing ever larger and rounder, filling up His horizon, until at length it broke over Him, as a morning without clouds, a clear, serene, absolute conviction that He had entered the world to do a particular

work, which none else could do and which none could undo, after He had left it. As it is said that the burrows of small rodent animals cause ruptures in the dikes of rivers and bring on inundations which lay many square miles of land under water; so, too, it is also supposable that little circumstances, infinitesimal increments of experience and knowledge, from year to year, successive disclosures of the Divine Will, finally produced the full, brimming, overflowing certitude, sweeping before it all obstacles, like a mountain torrent when the snows melt and the thaw comes on, and carrying Jesus right into the crowded scenes of His public life. Men have puzzled themselves for nineteen hundred years trying to settle the ratio of divine to human in the person of Jesus Christ; it is an inexhaustible controversy. Beyond a few simple affirmations by Christ and His apostles, no definite values or constant quantities are given as a basis for calculation. Who can tell, for example, when this sublime, sacred consciousness of a Divine Call and work upon the earth took hold of His thoughts; at what age and whether progressively and insensibly, like a growth of vegetation, or miraculously

and suddenly, like a flash of lightning? The action of spiritual influence is, of all things, in the universe, the most mysterious and obscure. We cannot track even our own thoughts to their origins; they are often lost, like rivers, whose sources the explorer finds in tiny threads of water struggling amid sands and gravel and tangled underwood and wattled twigs and branches. Man cannot predict the rise of his own best thoughts. The poet, the artist, the thinker, the inventor, cannot fix a time for the exaltation of his mental faculties and the descent upon him of fertile, affluent suggestions, sure that they will arrive as by schedule. How or why they chanced to come with such volume and impetus, just when and as they did, the man cannot say; the whole process is inscrutable. And much more occult are those ideas that have turned the current of the world, put a new face on society, and ultimated in unspeakable results for mankind. Doubtless there came a tremendous hour to Jesus wherein there was borne in upon Him the glowing conviction, "I am the Man of Prophecy," "I am the Star that Balaam saw," "I am the Bud that was to blossom on the stem of Jesse," "Abra-

ham saw my day, Joseph in Egypt, Ezekiel and Daniel in Babylon, Isaiah away yonder before the Captivity, all the patriarchs and prophets desired to see my day!"

What a thought to slide into any man's soul! Who, among the sons of men, would dare to think it? Who could utter it, without insufferable egotism, save Jesus Christ? How did He get it, whence did it come? Clearly we are upon ground where it is easier to ask questions than to answer them;—this is the metaphysical kingdom, the kingdom of spirit, where mathematical measurements and detective instruments are of no avail. The origin of ideas, of sentiments, of presentiments, of purposes, and particularly that highest expression of spiritual force, called moral inspiration, these manifestations do not lie open to view and are not susceptible of estimates, not being objects of sense-perception. Here, at length, is a subtle, imponderable somewhat, invisible as the elastic ether that floods and floats the universe and all its worlds. Here stretches the narrow bridge enveloped in mists, which connects the two spheres —the Seen and the Unseen, the empirical and the

metempirical. Teachers in every department of inquiry take you by the hand and lead you up to it, but they cannot take you across, they cannot enter into the cloud, they cannot push through the fog and spray; the footing is slippery and insecure. True, some say there is really nothing there with which we are not familiar, under other forms; that the human consciousness, even in its highest moments, is a freak of matter, a product of matter of high sensitivity and organized in a peculiar manner, and that it cannot survive its present association. Nevertheless there is a shrewd suspicion, to say the least, among mankind, that this is not a full account of the matter, and that the phenomena are too surprising to admit of such easy solution. Man is somehow tempted to believe that there is a vast ambient sphere and blue infinite vault overhead filled with flocks of ideas, forms, patterns, archetypes, truths, which now and again flutter down, falling upon this and that one, kindling him into reflexion and pushing him on to the edge of action. We do not attempt to picture that ideal kingdom or determine its locality and geography; none the less do we refer the higher faculties of the soul, and

especially its superlative products, to a spiritual rather than to a mechanical origin. This is notably true of those who have expounded a wider horizon and seen deeper into the heart of things, than most. For all have not stood equi-distant from the great other-world with its idealisms, inspirations, and imperatives. God has imparted Himself to some more than to others. Some have possessed intuition and foresight, which others have had only in a low expression, and others again, not at all; but in no case do we reach the core of the difficulty—how the infinite realm beyond us acts upon our finite experience. Take for example this profound conviction, rather this immediate knowledge which sprang up in the soul of Jesus Christ. Consider the predictions and precepts which He threw out, and whose line has gone into all the earth, and runs like a ground-melody through all history, so that the epochal events, the cardinal revolutions of nineteen hundred years, look like so many beads strung upon the central thread of His wise forecasting thought;—and what shall we say of such a phenomenon? What was it that whispered to Him that "His time had not yet come"? What led

Him to look forward confidently into the vast, dim, unplumbed future, where no lead had been dropped and no soundings had been taken? When did He first begin to suspect His intimate relation with the Eternal? When did the nascent idea begin to grow upon Him, like an immediate presentation of sense, that He came from God and went to God? Such questions are unanswerable, but they go to exalt Christ sheer above the level of our humanity. He lived and moved in the Divine consciousness. As the delicate strings of the harp tremble and vibrate and give forth a sound when a strong gust of wind sweeps across them; so too He responded to those powerful and mystical influences which come forth from the World of Spirit—these were His native air. The spectacle is so solitary in its sublimity that there is no explanation for it, save this of a divine, invisible kingdom out of which Jesus brought some fragments of absolute Truth, which He set forth by means of those lame analogies, shattered mirrors, mumbled hints, to be found in our world of mortal experience. The powers He evinced, the grasp with which He firmly held both worlds, the character He exhibited, His

inspiration, His certitude, all tend to open up new potentialities in our nature and to show that there are secrets in the universe that cannot yet be explained.

II. The language here used by Christ suggests another obvious topic, that there is a radical difference between men both in regard to their native powers and the part they are called to act. These perfervid admirers wanted their master to make a brilliant display and pile miracle upon miracle, like the waves that rippled and broke upon the shore of lake Tiberias; He replies virtually, "I must be guided by My own feeling in this matter. You can do as you please; but I must bide My time." That is to say, the order of one's mind, the volume and intensity of his nature, the point he occupies in the historic evolution, the character of his work, must be left to settle minor and incidental questions. Thinking him to be a man run in the same mould and built up of the same materials with themselves, these officious people would thrust him upon action; they knew quite well what they would do, were they gifted as he, and so they reasoned quite inconsequently from the premises of their nature and tem-

per to a set of conclusions in reference to the Christ. But this was their fallacy. Jesus had different ideas and expectations, a totally different consciousness from theirs; they were ordinary men, hence their "time was always ready;" whereas His opportunity hinged upon contingencies and conditions which could neither be hastened nor delayed, and which would ripen in due time.

It is worthy of remark, then, as a general truth, that in the ratio of one's power and depth and superiority of nature is there apt to be an accompanying limitation, or disability, some prohibitory clause interfering with the full and perfect disclosure of himself, preventing him from doing what another might do and laying him open to criticism and misunderstanding, whether he venture or whether he refrain. Look at this matter in a human and historical point of view and it appears to be a true distinction. Thinkers, discoverers, reformers in every age of the world, men of wide forecast and serious reflexion and powerful talent, whose endowments have lifted them above the run of their contemporaries, have found that these very gifts have often acted as a kind of retarding brake

or drag upon them, and that one of the penalties of their greatness was to be misunderstood and maligned. In many cases, they have been obliged to appeal to that highly metaphysical tribunal, called "Posterity," their ideas have been branded as inspirations of the evil one, they have been obliged to carry on their investigations in secrecy and have announced their conclusions with fear and trembling, and have even retracted them, in order to gain a little longer breathing spell.

It is an old story that superior minds have often had to reckon with the ignorance, prejudice, ridicule, and terrorism of their time; because they lived before their time; "their time had not yet come." They had flashes of insight and foresight; they had private interpretations of God, of man, of nature, of the universe; they had esoteric doctrines, which the world saw later on to be approximative of the truth, but which were not acceptable to those to whom they were, at first, delivered—the ideas survived, but the men perished. In every era those who have risen up to press changes, to agitate reforms, to recommend innovations, to proclaim any truth above the level of their time and

out of harmony with its feeling and spirit, have run the risk either of passive neglect or active maltreatment. This seems to have been the penalty awaiting extraordinary intelligence and courage, working with a view to the instruction and elevation of the race. Now, in the case of average, prosaic, people, there is no such danger, "their time is alway ready," because they have nothing particular to say, no lever to move their world, no stick to stir the green-coated, slimy stagnancy, no stroke of work to deliver: as Jesus said to His impatient friends, "they might go and come and no one would think anything about it;" but not so with Himself, He had a call, a message. And so it is now and always has been. For, it is a notable fact that the world has rarely disturbed any one who has not first disturbed it; the pool lies placid till you fling the stone into it, and then the flash and spatter. So long as men are let alone, they are comparatively harmless. Inertia, self-indulgence, self-conceit, ignorance; upon these we sit and snore as upon soft, luxurious cushions. In no age of time has society shown much favor to those who would jostle and shake it out of apathy

and give men a better impulse. And if into the midst of a carnal, self-satisfied, slumberous age one is suddenly dropped, who, looking around, bethinks himself that men are not what they ought to be, if he be one fired by lofty ideals, of deep earnestness and strong desire, and high moral qualities, one who believes not only in concrete facts but also in abstract ideas, one who believes that the visible world of particulars only exists and is valuable by virtue of the fact that it is laved by an ideal world of universals, that sensible matter and visible things are only perfect and true in so far as they envelope an idea or clothe a thought, and that the relative dignity of anything consists in the order of thought it symbolizes—I say, if such an one, a great, deep, lofty, oracular soul, happens to alight in the world, at a date when such regal qualities are not in request, and among a race of people not sufficiently ripe to understand him, what a buzz and flutter there will be! What bovine stares from the dull cattle dozing under the breezy trees and lazily fanning the flies from their sides! What a grinning and chattering among the apes and light-headed gentry that always crowd the world of every age!

What ominous guttural mutterings and suspicious glances from all the dogs in the manger, who had hoped that their immemorial possession of the crib would never be challenged! What a loud chorus of disapproval springs up when once a man is born into the world who has power to shake men and a rare knowledge to teach them, courage to rebuke, adventure and foresight to lead, compassion to pity, intuition to see what is needed and resources to supply it! Surely it may be said of such an one that his "time is not always ready." If he comes too soon, likely they will kill him, as the early bud is nipped by the frost; if he tells too much truth, people will call him a liar; if his zeal be fiery and impatient, he may act rashly and overset what he meant to establish; if he press on too fast, he will be named "fanatic," "dreamer," "leveller"; if he be ruggedly honest and direct, the foxes and eels among mankind will name him "hypocrite"; if he have profound convictions, the men of easy conscience and virtue will say, "'Tis only a blind, he is a wolf in a sheep's skin, he has some sinister motive." Let one be built up on all sides a grand, colossal, columnar character, and then be lowered

down into a world of Lilliputians, and directly they will begin to prick him with their needles and entangle him with their packthread; he will find labor and sorrow.

'Tis a commonplace to say that two conditions, at least, are necessary to set on foot any great benefit for mankind or to organize any permanent institute; these are "the hour and the man." They must coincide; they must arrive simultaneously. The mind of the time must be ready and acquiescent, and then there must come along one in whom its characteristic traits and tendencies are incorporated and who can give voice to what is dumb and struggling in it. For, there is a tide in human affairs, and no great work on earth can be pushed or postponed, according to private whim; there is a day, an hour for it, and the thing must be handled at the opportune juncture. This is one of the rigid limitations by which all high and enduring work done, in this world, is circumscribed. God, the superintending Providence, appears to have arranged it so that mankind shall not get on too fast; there are plenty of brakes and buffers on our train of Humanity. The steam guage is constantly

falling and fuel must be supplied; nay more, it seems often to give out altogether and we come to a dead stand opposite an unhealthy marsh or in the heart of a dark tunnel or belt of woods. It seems clear that man must not be allowed to make progress rapidly. We have to wait for the best things; one cannot hasten his education or compress his experience. The commonplaces can easily be disposed of. The fop may display his vanity at any time. The blatant, empty person may utter his folly and need wait for nothing; he shall always find those to listen and applaud. The buffoon, the wonder-monger, the dealer in cheap mysteries, the quack, the mountebank, may play his tricks and find his account in the credulity and curiosity of humankind; he who has small wares to dispose of, in any department, can find a rôle and make a living. The indolent, easy-going, epicureans, may prosecute their "masterly inactivities" without let or hindrance—"their time is always ready." All times, in fact, are alike to one who has no high or special aim in life; indeed when a definite, earnest purpose is taken out of one's life, then, his "time is always ready"; he may go or come, he may wake

or sleep, he may feed or fast, he may ride or walk, he may omit or commit—it is all one, all immaterial; for he has no chief end, no high ideal. And so it happens that exactly as one rises in the scale of character, and in his type of life, do complications set in, and the man finds it more arduous to carry his points. So long as one is content to browse, obstacles are few, none are likely to interfere; but let him rise a degree or two, and the skies begin to cloud, perplexity thickens, trouble springs up. Let him rise still higher and there is more of the same kind. Antagonism, friction, pronounced enmities grow apace: one "does not admire this about him," another "does not like that." Still let him mount, taking ever higher ground, living soberly, righteously, conscientiously, a man of lofty character, of definite convictions, of incorruptible probity, striving to realize noble ideals; and in proportion to this does the way become lonely and arduous. Any one who cherishes a high and earnest aim in life is liable to be thwarted, and postponed; his progress will be slow. There are stumps and bowlders on the road, there are deep gulleys and treacherous soils, the bridge is down ahead and he

cannot pass that way, or a vexatious toll-tax calls a halt, he must tinker this and compound another matter. And often will he be tempted to say within himself, "This is a strange, incongruous world to be the creation of a God of almighty skill and absolute perfection, seeing there are so many sources of scepticism and doubt and delay." I say that, looking upon notorious facts, the time for high, beneficent, fruitful action is not always ripe; the time for serious, effective, executive men is not always ready. Such must often stand and wait, watch and pray; they must temporize until the hour strikes. This is the state of man; he is ushered upon a theatre peculiarly adapted to the display of great virtues, and for this reason, the time to satisfy his aspirations and to get the finest results is not always ready,—seems to tarry, looks like a cold, distant star, or a grey, unrisen morning.

Oh! yes; there is plenty of time for going wrong, for making a tremendous fool of oneself, for trifling, for forms and foolishness, for eating and drinking; "time" in which to waste one's substance and play the prodigal and squander one's talents. Strange to tell, there is time for everything that is not

important, not material. The little non-essentials of life, how industriously they get attended to! into what a fine lather do we work ourselves over small observances which mean little and come to nothing! Verily the time for trifles is always ready. But to get virtue, knowledge, self-mastery, a true valuation of acts and things, a divine philosophy of life,—to get an inkling of God, His method, His will, His universe,—to get vision, discretion, discernment; how arduous this! What a climbing of summit after summit; what infinite toil and trouble! Great works, high endeavor, fruitful thoughts, useful activities, the fashioning of the will and the affections is not easy and fluent, is not constitutional to man. It is rather a painful process, a tedious ascent. This world is a place of rehearsals, for the scraping of strings, the whine of hautboys and the premonitory blare of trombones. If we can interpret this standing mystery of man on the earth, this is the idea, with immense patience and stumbling footsteps and many setbacks and sidings, to bring him gradually towards manhood and the day of graduation. God, his maker, will not have him educated too fast or come too early to maturity; he

must be tempted, discouraged, plagued, exercised in various disciplines: "My time is not yet come" is a motto fit to be written over man's highest faculties, over what is prophetic and divine in him. The shallow, worthless things can be had at almost any time: but the ripe results, the substantial gains, these are the work of a life, must be angled for, hunted, captured, by skill, courage, coolness, sustained effort. Moreover, the same general law is made manifest in the corporate experience of mankind. The race ripens slowly.

After each battle, upon the heel of each revolution in public opinion, after each wide social change, after a civilization has done its work and lived its day; we still seem to hear the solemn, vibrant voice of Christ, "My time is not yet." Around not a few of the world-epochs, mighty populations have gathered with quick pulse and high hope and loud acclaim, thinking that now, at length, an age of gold, a divine order of society, was to supervene. When some despot was beheaded, some reform carried, some nuisance abated, some intrenched iniquity that had set its nest among the stars, was brought down, when some Babylon fell or Bastile was blown

up, or some putative Antichrist was bound with chains and cast into a pit; then men have often thought that the "City of God" was descending fresh and clean out of the open Heaven. This has been the cry from age to age. Man is impatient, feverish, eager, full of clamor and curiosity—"his time is always ready." He would have history compressed and events hastened. And so with each loud explosion and cardinal epoch, there has sprung up a quiet hope that the world would grow suddenly wiser and better, and that evil, like Sennacherib's army, would perish as by miracle. But, thus far, it has not been so. A point has been gained here and there, some small advantage has been won; while above the harsh discords and universal ferment the words have sounded soft and low, yet clear and full, "My time, My triumph, My kingdom is not yet." God's wish for man has not fructified: "the beast has not been worked out of him, the ape and tiger have not died within him"—but that time must come.

Through what phases the Christian Idea is yet to pass, what will be its final interpetation and form, is still obscure; what the kingdom of God

will resemble when orbicular and complete, this no prophet has quite foretold, no artist has sketched its dome and pinnacles and rock-bound strength; but in some superlative degree it must be fulfilled. The type of character brought in by Jesus Christ must be the dominant type, else God will suffer defeat and man will be a failure; the spirit of Christ must be the universal spirit. Go out, then, each of you to serve this precious interest, in your own way; in this respect, "your time is alway ready." Your time mayhap is not "ready" to be prophet, poet, pioneer, statesman, discoverer, inventor, a "pilot of humanity," a king of men; that depends upon seasons and circumstances, the "personal equation." One must have a call and ordination for that. A man cannot start up and be Lycurgus, Socrates, St. Paul, Lord Bacon and the like, at will; the time is not always ready for that character, for that rôle. That depends upon the "time-spirit," the crisis, the stuff one is made of. But it is always a time for high and tenacious ideals, for moral courage, for a keen conscience, for fidelity to duty and a righteous purpose, and for the unflinching application of sound principles to all cases. Go forth then

into life full of noble impulses, full of justice, mercy, good will and righteousness. There is plenty waiting to be done, some plough stands idle for you, "your time is alway ready."

The 19th century just closed has contributed largely to the progress and welfare of the race. It has laid the Atlantic cable, it has discovered the Roentgen ray, the aseptic treatment in surgery, the process of making Bessemer steel; it has studied the work and uses of bacteria, it has invented smokeless powder, and applied mechanics and physics to augment the comfort of man, it has attained to considerable mastery of electrical forces: it has produced great literatures, great masters of sentences and models of style, men of masculine genius, energetic apostles of spiritual movements and moral reforms. Yet, with all its splendid doings, the world is not finished: "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, that which is wanting cannot be numbered." There are large practical problems left over, and evils of all kinds crying for correction, such as the honest and economical administration of city governments, the best way to utilize the paupers and parasites of society, the spread of clean-

liness, order, thrift, enlightenment; in one word, the redemption of man from his filthiness and his idols still tarries—is "a far-off—divine event." But each of us may help it on, may keep the world toward it. You may not be famous; but you may be useful. Each of us may believe in God, in Earth and Time as part of a moral system, in Christ and in the Christian kingdom, and we may live under the power of these great hopes and impressions: "the time for this is always ready." Some task awaits you, some work which you can best do: "do it then with thy might." Seek not great things, but rather do that which lies nearest to hand and for which the time, the opportunity seems ripe; for the end of all our doing is education, growth, power. Not only to carry reforms and make betterments and leave the world happier than one found it, much less to make machinery or money; but nobler, worthier still, to fashion the will, to ripen the soul, to extract from all the disciplines and lessons of life spiritual values, humility, reverence, faith, unselfishness, courage, veracity; this is the will of God concerning us—spiritual integrity—our sanctification. And for this "the time is alway ready:"

the world is an admirable workshop for the making of souls, for the turning out of men: for this, almost anything will answer, and all days are propitious. Go hence, and make men of yourselves, leaders if "your time be ready," but, in any event, workers—co-workers with God—towards the kingdom of Light and of Christ.

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